

VZCZCXRO4631
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHKUK
DE RUEHKB #0382/01 1131434
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 221434Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5194
INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0759
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0297
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA 0036

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000382

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC, ISN AND IO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/22/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [MNUC](#) [KNNP](#) [IR](#) [RS](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN HALTS RUSSIAN SHIPMENT TO BUSHEHR AT
BORDER WITH IRAN

REF: A. STATE 21770
[1](#)B. BAKU 380

Classified By: DCM Donald Lu per 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: Azerbaijani officials, including Foreign Minister Mammadyarov, confirmed press reports that the GOAJ had detained at the southern Astara border crossing a Russian shipment destined for Iran's Bushehr reactor. Mammadyarov said that the Russian Government still had not provided any information on the contents of the containers. Russia has told Azerbaijan that any equipment destined for Bushehr is exempt from UN sanctions. The Ambassador provided Mammadyarov another copy of the U.S. non-paper on UNSCR 1803, clarifying the steps Russia must take in order to make use of the UNSCR exemptions for Bushehr. A working-level MFA official expressed concern that the Russian shipment had been allowed to enter Azerbaijani territory and stated that corruption in Azerbaijan's Customs Service likely was to blame. End summary.

[1](#)2. (S) In an April 22 meeting with visiting Under Secretary for Economic, Energy and Agricultural Affairs Reuben Jeffery III and the Ambassador, Foreign Minister Mammadyarov confirmed press reports that Azerbaijan had stopped and held at the southern Astara border crossing a Russian shipment destined for Iran's Bushehr reactor. Mammadyarov said the shipment had been held at the Astara crossing for "almost two weeks" and that the Russian Government still had not provided any information on the contents of the containers. According to Mammadyarov, the Russian Government claims that any equipment destined for Bushehr is exempt from UN sanctions. The Ambassador provided Mammadyarov another copy of the U.S. non-paper on UNSCR 1803 (ref a), clarifying the steps Russia must take in order to make use of the UNSC exemptions from Bushehr. Mammadyarov commented that the Russians "made a huge mistake" by leaking this story to the press. The episode demonstrates that Azerbaijan is under pressure from Russia and Iran; Azerbaijan, he said, hopes that this incident will earn Azerbaijan the respect of the U.S. and the international community.

[1](#)3. (S) In a separate April 22 meeting, MFA First Secretary for Arms Control Yusuf Mammadaliyev said that the MFA was waiting to receive detailed documentation from the Russian Embassy and, only once it had a chance to review the documents, would make a decision about whether to allow the shipment to continue into Iran. Mammadaliyev planned to meet with his Russian counterparts later in the day and promised to contact Emboffs if there was any clarification of the issue. Mammadaliyev stressed that the GOAJ fully understood all of the sanctions regarding Iran's nuclear program and the exemptions for Bushehr. Mammadaliyev expressed concern that

the shipment had entered and traveled through Azerbaijan (presumably through the northern border crossing with Russia) before being stopped at the southern Astara border crossing into Iran. Mammadaliyev stated that corruption in Azerbaijan's customs service was the likely cause for the shipment's entry into Azerbaijan from Russia.

¶4. (U) The local press has reported extensively on this incident. According to unconfirmed local press reports, the Russian shipment contains heat insulating equipment which Russia's Atomstroieexport claims had passed Russian export controls, was not subject to any UN sanctions, and was not included on lists of dual purpose items or other lists of export items subject to special control. However, Azerbaijan's State Customs Committee's chief spokesman claimed that shipments to Bushehr belong to a special category of goods and require special permission for transit. Since this permission was not shown to customs officials at the border, the shipment was not allowed to cross into Iran. According to the press, the Iranian Embassy has no official information about the stalled cargo, and Russia and Azerbaijan are discussing how to resolve the issue.

¶5. (C) Azerbaijani independent political commentator Ilgar Mammadov opined that it is very unlikely that Russia would try to ship anything illegal through Azerbaijan. He believes that the GOAJ was correct in stopping the shipment and requesting that Russia demonstrate its legality. He noted that Moscow had leaked news about the shipment to the press and suggested that Russia might be using the stalled shipment as a means to blame Azerbaijan for the continuing and multiple delays associated with the construction of the Bushehr reactor. (In press reporting an Atomstroieexport official expressed his concern that the stalled shipment

BAKU 00000382 002 OF 002

might push back the time frame for the completion of Bushehr.)

¶6. (C) Comment: If the shipment in question does in fact contain equipment for the Bushehr reactor, this issue can likely be resolved quickly if Russia produces the necessary paperwork. It remains unclear why Moscow tried to make this shipment through Azerbaijan without supplying this documentation, why it continued to withhold this documentation for over 20 days, and why it eventually revealed information about the stalled shipment to the press. We continue to monitor the situation. Per ref b, any additional guidance from the Department would be welcome.
DERSE